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ABSTRACT

Intended for teachers of grades 4 through 8 who want to adapt the activities listed in the publication "P.S. Write Soon!" for classroom use, this guide provides chapter by chapter examples of the kinds of classroom projects suggested by the book that can be incorporated into an existing unit on letter writing or used as the basis for letter writing activities throughout the year. Writing the world's longest letter, letters of welcome, or "anywhere letters" are some activities suggested for the book's first section, "The Joy of Letter Writing." Projects suggested for the second section, "Letters Make Things Happen" include cut-and-paste business letters, "comparison popping," and envelope tours. Making collage cards and invitations with cancelled stamps are two possibilities presented for section 3, "Making Your Mail." Activities presented for the "Fun with Letters" section include having older students serve as scribes for younger children, show and tell with stamps, and starting a stamp club. Making the most out of abbreviation is the project that can be used with the next section, "Addressing Your Mail." For the final section, "Anything Can Happen," the guide suggests introducing students to the youthful letters of the famous. A bibliography covering letters in history and biography, letters in literature, books inspired by stamps, kids writing to celebrities, moving the mail, and other interesting books completes the guide. (JL)

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To the Teacher

P.S. Write soon! (grades 4–8) has been written so that young (and prospective) letter writers can follow it on their own. Teachers, however, may easily adapt many of the activities described there for classroom use with groups of students or by the class as a whole. Letters to the editor, pen pals, family histories, thank-you notes, and requests for information from government agencies are only a few examples of how closely the book's content fits into the language arts curriculum.

What follows are examples of the kinds of classroom projects suggested by the book. Although these ideas are arranged by chapter, they may be incorporated into an existing unit on letter writing or used as the basis for letter-writing activities throughout the year. This guide ends with a bibliography that suggests the importance of letters in history, biography, and literature and lists books about letters with special appeal to youngsters.

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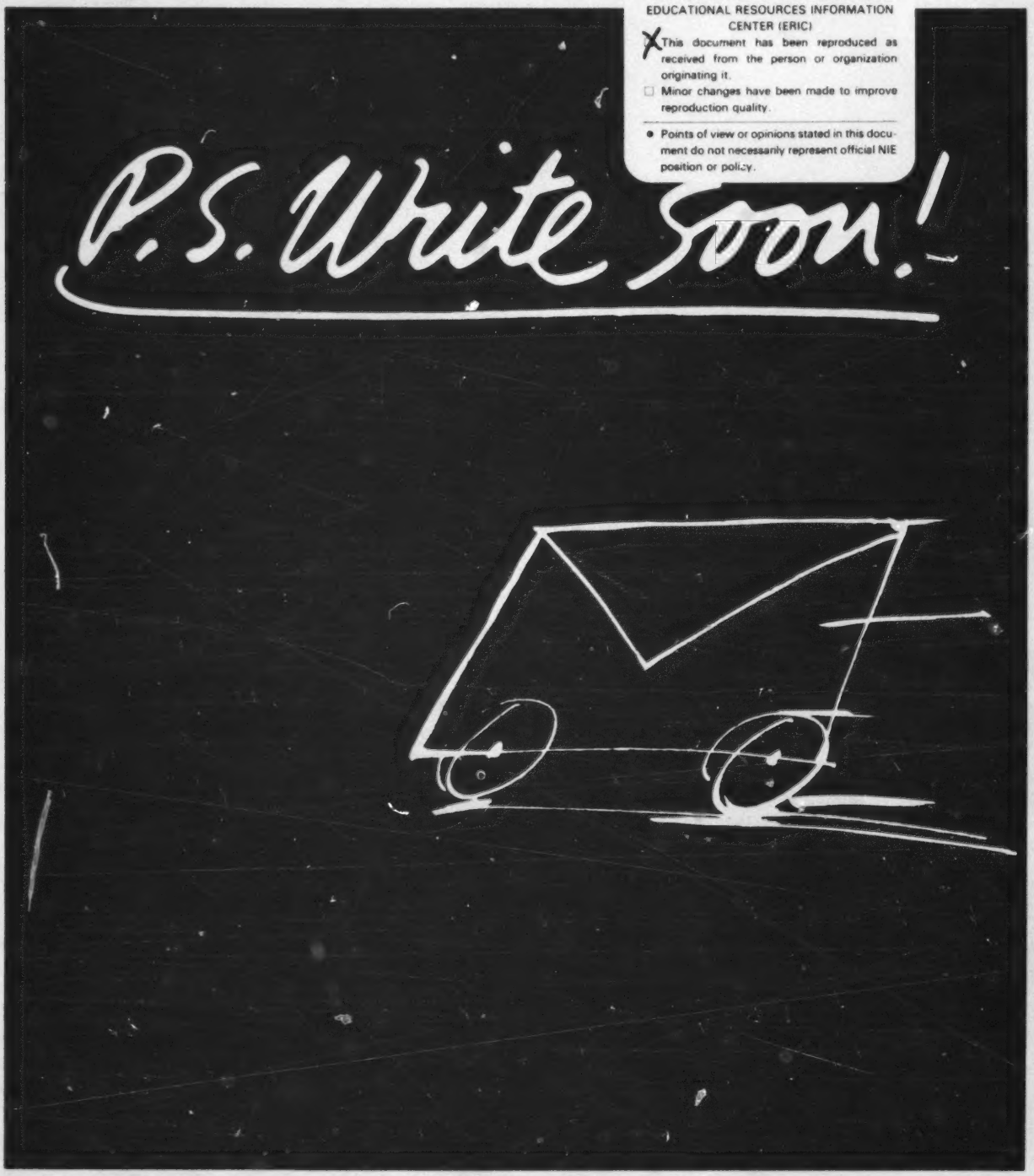

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The Joy of Letter Writing

The World's Longest Letter

Help your class create the world's longest letter to send to a classmate in the hospital or to a student who has recently moved away. A roll of shelf paper, glue, and felt-tip pens are all you'll need.

Begin by listing ideas together at the chalkboard: the missed math test, the broken hydrant across from the schoolyard, the baby birds in the nest outside the library window—even the school lunch menu makes interesting reading when it includes the comments of grade-school gourmets. Each student then writes a draft of one or two paragraphs. Encourage students to read these paragraphs aloud in small groups, revising and recopying their work and sharing the task of proofreading.

Now you're ready to unroll the shelf paper and provide a date and salutation. Students paste their paragraphs in place; don't forget to insert one or two of your own. Borders can be added with colored pens and illustrations inserted in the margins. Students may sign their own contributions or the class may elect to sign all names at the end of the letter. If the class decides in favor of a group signature, add this note: P.S. Can you figure out who wrote what?

And Now, a Few Words of Welcome

One of the most thoughtful letters your students can write is addressed to the incoming class—kindergartners, fourth-graders, sixth-graders, whatever the entry level is at your school. If your school has a visiting day in the spring for next fall's students, the letter can be read or distributed at that time. If not, write the letter anytime during the late spring and deliver it to the classrooms of newcomers on the first day of school.

Outline with your students the material they feel is most important for new students to know: a map of the school, people to know at school (secretary, custodian, principal, nurse, librarian), fun at school (the Halloween parade, book character dress-up day, the spring picnic), school traditions, school rules, helpful tips (how to find a lost mitten, what to do if you forgot your lunch).

When the outline is complete, divide the class into small groups. Each group tackles a topic, drafts its copy, revises, and recopies. You may want to appoint a copy-editing team to be in charge of introductory and closing paragraphs and the sequencing of copy. It's not necessary for one student to do all the recopying; in fact, your letter of welcome will seem more personal if its parts have been carefully copied by representatives from each contributing group.

Anywhere Letters

Use a class letter to introduce your students to a new region of the country or, if you teach in a large city, to an unfamiliar part of town. You can opt for a single composite letter written by the class, for letters written by students in small groups, or for a letter from each student in the class.

You might, for example, divide the class into four or five groups by regions of the United States. The members of each group compose a letter addressed to their counterparts in a school system located in the geographical region they chose: To a Fifth-Grade Class, Kenosha Public Schools, Kenosha, WI 53141. Encourage students to tell what makes their city or state special: people, architecture, local industries, scenic and recreational areas, ethnic foods and festivals, interesting bits of history and geography. Include school news (size of the school, school colors, school clubs and events) and personal profiles: the number of boys and the number of girls in the class, the fastest runner in the class, the person with the longest hair, the longest and shortest names, favorite books and records and food.

Ask the anywhere class that receives your letter to write back, sharing news of themselves, their school, and their region of the country.

Letters Make Things Happen

Cut-and-Paste Business Letters

Business letter form is a challenge for young letter writers, and they need opportunites for trial and error before writing to government and state agencies, local editors, and television stations. The cut-and-paste business letter is one such opportunity. You'll need paste, a business envelope for each student, and access to a copying machine.

Write a business letter of at least two paragraphs. Omit punctuation on the inside addresses, salutation, and closing. You may omit important capitals and misspell a word or two, depending on your teaching objectives at the time. Then write a perfect copy of this letter, all sections correctly positioned, punctuation and capitalization correct. Make a copy of each of these letters for each student.

Now cut so your students can paste. Cut the incorrect copies apart, separating each section—date, inside addresses, salutation, complimentary closing, signature, even the paragraphs in the body of the letter. Place the pieces of each letter in an envelope and deliver one to each student along with a blank sheet of paper. Students then arrange the component pieces as they think the letter should appear—including the order of the paragraphs. When they are satisfied, they paste the pieces in place. Next students proofread the letter for missing punctuation and capitalization. The final step is to address the business envelope, fold the letter correctly, and insert it.

Distribute the letter-perfect copies so that students can correct their own cut-and-paste business letters.

Comparison Popping

Youngsters enjoy sleuthing. Youngsters love popcorn. Combine the two in a project complete with research report and accompanying letter.

You'll need at least three brands of popcorn (be sure to include generic), an electric popper, measuring cups, and oil. Control all variables carefully—use the same popper for each batch, the same brand of oil; use identical quantities; purchase the corn on the same day, and so on. Work out in advance the criteria that will be used

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to rate the popcorn: number of unpopped kernels, volume of popped corn, texture, flavor. Cost, of course, will affect the final evaluations. Brand X, for example, has ten more unpopped kernels than Brand Y, but it costs only half as much.

Write up the results of this experiment as a research report. Your science teacher may want to help students devise ways to present these comparisons clearly and fairly. You may want to use tables and graphs.

When the research report is complete, make copies and send one to each of the popcorn manufacturers along with a letter explaining the project. Your letters will probably be answered by the advertising or marketing division, but even if they're not, take some time after the project to talk about comparison shopping, advertising claims, and consumer complaints. It's best to accompany this discussion with bowls of freshly popped corn.

Envelope Tours

Students can learn a lot about how effective a letter can be as they learn a lot about their home states. All you need is a state map, yarn or string, and a box of map pins to begin touring.

Help students to compile a list of places to write for information about your state. Your school or local librarian can help. Parents will also have suggestions if you assign students to ask. You'll need at least a dozen resources to begin, but never consider this list complete. Add to it as long as the project continues.

You'll want as wide a range of sources as possible: state historical societies, museums, state department of tourism, chambers of commerce in major cities, state park offices. Encourage students to follow their own interests and to discover new ones: state fishing regulations, arts and crafts festivals, historical buildings, cycling paths. Is there a cannery or paper mill that offers a tour to the public? Does a city sponsor a tour of its beautiful old homes? What are the home schedules for local ball or hockey teams?

When you have twelve or fifteen addresses, assign partners. Each student pair writes to one of the resources on the list, requesting appropriate information. Teamwork helps in revising and proofing and in achieving a letter-perfect final copy.

Now tack the state map on the largest bulletin board you have. As the letters of inquiry go out, tack a copy of each around the perimeter of the map, attaching it by a piece of yarn to a map pin stuck in the city to which the letter was mailed. When a response arrives, share it with the class before tacking it to the letter that elicited it. Soon your state map will be surrounded by brochures, letters, and pamphlets. Everyone will have learned a lot about the recreational, historical, cultural, and commercial interests of your state—and about touring in an envelope.

Making Your Mail

Collage Cards

You'll need stacks of old magazines, heavy paper stock, scissors, and paste when your class designs collage cards for classmates.

Students draw names to identify the classmate for whom they will design a collage to appear on a folded note. It's illegal to announce the name drawn. Next, students look through magazines for pictures or parts of pictures that characterize the person whose name they drew: pizza, roller skates, a tennis racket, perhaps an initial carefully worked into the collage. Pet hates, likes, and student trademarks of all sorts are fair game. Students then design the note card on which the classmate collage will be pasted—square, rectangular, circular.

When the collage cards are finished, line them up on the chalk ledge with an identifying number written on the board above each. Ask students to number a sheet of paper to correspond to the numbers above the cards. Each student then tries to identify as many of the classmates portrayed in the collages as possible. Commemorative stamps make an appropriate prize for the student making the most identifications.

Double the fun in this project by asking students to create collages that portray themselves. They can look for these pictures at the same time they are looking for pictures to create a collage of a classmate. At the end of the project, each student takes home two note cards—one a collage interpretation by a classmate and the other a self-interpretation.

Stamped with Approval

You'll need unlined file cards, paste, and a large assortment of canceled stamps for this project, so ask students, fellow teachers, and neighbors for help in advance.

Have your students use canceled stamps to create the next set of invitations and place cards your school or class needs. A file card decorated with stamps—a border, an asymmetrically positioned composite of stamps, stamps turned with a few strokes of a pen into houses, vehicles, fanciful creatures—becomes the invitation. A file card folded in half crosswise and similarly decorated with canceled stamps becomes a place card.

These sets are useful for many school occasions—parent days, brown-bag luncheons for fathers, PTA potlucks.

Fun with Letters

Scribes for Younger Children

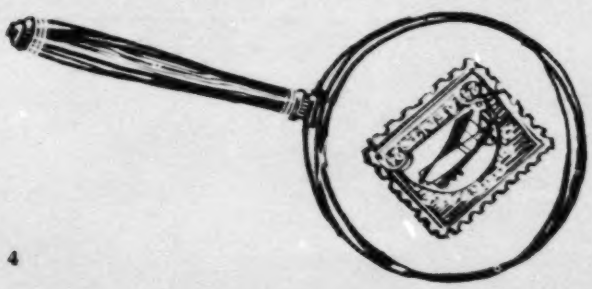
Older students will enjoy serving as scribes for a kindergarten class. Schedule the visit before a popular holiday like Mother's Day or Valentine's Day, or before a less familiar holiday such as Groundhog Day or Columbus Day. Bring along construction paper, crayons, colored pencils, felt-tip pens, stickers, stars, and other card-making supplies. Pair each older student with a kindergartner, and have the twosome work together at constructing a card before the scribe writes down the message dictated by the kindergartner. Scribes can show kindergartners how to create their own special sign-off with a handprint below their signatures. Conclude the activity by making envelopes for the cards.

Show and Tell with Stamps

To demonstrate how stamps depict stories of celebrated figures and past accomplishments, have each student bring in a stamp for a show-and-tell day. The stamps can be from the United States or from a foreign country and can depict any person (Benjamin Franklin, Pearl Buck, Ponce de Leon) or any topic (state birds, Olympic games, patchwork quilts). Each student mounts the stamp on an index card that is passed around the classroom as the student provides information on the historical figure, scientific advancement, sporting event, or architectural design. Talks to accompany foreign stamps can touch on the country's geography, history, or political situation. To assure a wide variety of stamps for show-and-tell day, begin collecting interesting stamps early in the semester.

Stamp Clubs

For students in the third through seventh grades who are interested in stamp collecting, the U.S. Postal Service offers the Benjamin Franklin Stamp Club Program. Participating students receive a wallet I.D. card, a membership certificate, and seven issues of a newsletter, *Stamp Fun*, which features newly released stamps of the month, stories on stamp clubs around the country, games with stamps, and letters from club members. Additional ideas and projects for the club are suggested to the teacher (or other adult sponsor) in the *Leader Feature*, which accompanies the newsletter. For information on starting a stamp club, ordering audiovisual materials, and locating philatelic books and periodicals, contact your local post office or write to the National Program Headquarters, Benjamin Franklin Stamp Club, Washington, DC 20260-6355. And for a complete guide to stamp collecting with full-color illustrations, obtain a copy of *The Postal Service Guide to U.S. Stamps* ($3.50) from your local post office or school library.



Addressing Your Mail

Making the Most of an Abbreviation

Memorizing the abbreviations for the fifty state names can be fun. State abbreviation bingo gets the whole class involved. Print the Postal Service abbreviations on playing cards that resemble conventional bingo cards. When you read a state name, students who have and recognize the corresponding abbreviation cover it with a marker. The first student to cover a row correctly wins. Have students exchange cards before the next game.

Spelling bees or team relays are other ways for students to master state abbreviations. When you read a state name, a student responds by spelling its abbreviation. Work backwards, and ask students to spell the full name when you give the abbreviation.

Adapt the format of Concentration and Old Maid to make card games. Use 3" × 5" file cards and you won't waste time measuring and cutting. Make several decks of 100 cards (50 state names and 50 abbreviations) so that groups may play at the same time.

To play Concentration, three or four students assemble a 40-card deck, 20 state names and their corresponding abbreviations. These cards are shuffled and placed facedown at random or in rows. The first student turns over any two cards, hoping to uncover a state and its matching abbreviation. If a match is made, the cards are removed and the student receives a point. If not, the cards are placed facedown in their original positions and the second student turns over two cards. Students continue to match states and abbreviations until all cards have been paired.

Old Maid can also be played with these decks, pairing state names and corresponding abbreviations. Use a picture of a mailbox as the old maid card.

Winners of the state abbreviation games might receive colorful postage stamps or postcards as their prizes.

Anything Can Happen

A Little More about Lincoln

The letters and writings of Abraham Lincoln are often anthologized, highly praised for their style and wit, and deeply valued. Youngsters will enjoy learning about Lincoln's youth, his political career, and his family life from letters published in separate volumes and from letters quoted frequently and at length by biographers and historians.

The fact that Lincoln was a persistent writer at an early age—writing with charcoal, in the dust, in the snow, everywhere and anywhere—has been well documented. But students may not know that Abe served as a scribe for family and friends at the age of seven. His father could not write except to sign his name and although his mother could read, she had not been taught to write. So young Abe conducted the family correspondence. Letter writing by adults on the Indiana frontier was considered an accomplishment; by a boy of seven it was almost unbelievable (*Lincoln's Youth* by Louis A. Warren).

There are many anecdotes about young Lincoln with which students can identify. Youngsters in your classes might enjoy knowing, for example, that as a lad of fourteen he wrote in his copybook

> 'Tis Abraham Lincoln holds the pen,
> He will be good, but God knows when!
> (*Abe Lincoln's Jokes* edited by Max Stein)

Lincoln's fondness for and forbearance with his sons is revealed in a letter that Willie wrote as an eight-year-old when he accompanied his father to Chicago and experienced the adventure of staying overnight at a hotel. The reader can almost see Mr. Lincoln sharing Willie's excitement as they looked over their room at the Tremont House. "Me and father have a nice little room to ourselves," writes Willie. "We have two little pitcher on a washstand. The smallest one for me the largest one for father. We have two little towels on a top of both pitchers. The smallest one for me, the largest one for father." He goes on to note with obvious delight—just as if the hotel staff had foreseen that the room would be occupied by a tall father and his little son—that there were two beds and two wash basins in large and small sizes (*Lincoln's Sons* by Ruth Painter Randall).

Youthful Letters of the Famous

Students tend to approach the letters of famous people with awe, but they can identify with the persons behind the great names in literature and history books when they read the letters the famous wrote as youngsters. There is a universal quality to youthful experiences and emotions—as well as the ubiquitous nature of spelling errors. Here are a few examples.

No one, for example, knew in 1886 that Robert Frost would become one of America's most loved poets. Then he was only eleven and passing notes in school to a girl named Sabra Peabody. Several of these notes survived in a secret compartment of Sabra's wooden pencil box. One, written in September 1886, begins, "I liked those leavs you gave me and put them in my speller to press. I have got [to] read a composition after recess and I hate to offaly." Another reports seriously, "About me liking Lida better than you you are all wrong because I like you twice as much as I do her and always have thought more of you than any other girl I know of." The note ends, "I like you because I cant help myself and when I get mad at you I feel mad at myself to. From your loveing Rob" (*Selected Letters of Robert Frost* edited by Lawrance Thompson).

As a five-year-old in 1900, E. E. Cummings wrote to his father in a fashion typical of preschoolers yet hauntingly evocative (*Selected Letters* edited by F. W. Dupee and George Stade):

> FATHER DEAR. BE, YOUR FATHER—GOOD
> AND GOOD, HE IS GOOD NOW, IT IS NOT
> GOOD TO SEE IT RAIN, FATHER DEAR IS,
> IT, DEAR, NO FATHER DEAR I, LOVE,
> YOU DEAR,
> ESTLIN

Robinson Jeffers at ten wrote to his Papa in August of 1897 to recount the killing of a snake. His detailed description is obviously based on the thorough examination of a dead creature so typical of a child's curiosity about death, and yet it seems to presage a poet's eye for color and precision: "The baby and I were out in the garden when I saw a snake which afterwards measured 22 inches.... I killed it with my stick. I think, it was a garter snake. It was white under neath, black with green speckles on top, a greenish yellow band ran along its back, and large brown stripes ran lengthwise along its sides" (*The Selected Letters of Robinson Jeffers: 1897–1962* edited by Ann N. Ridgeway).

Thomas Wolfe, only nine, wrote to announce to dear Mama in June of 1909 that he had been promoted to 4 A from the 3 B grade: "When I took my examintains I was so good on my studies during the year that I only had to take one examination." He went on to report the ever predictable results of picnics and youthful appetites: "We had our sunday school picnic up at overlook park this year and I ate so much that I could hardly eat any supper" (*The Letters of Thomas Wolfe to His Mother* by C. Hugh Holman and Sue Fields Ross).

Bibliography

Letters in History and Biography

Letters give us important insights into history that no other kind of document can offer. There are the letters of Jefferson and Lincoln, the letters of General Lee, the letters of a woman homesteader, and letters from the Gold Rush. There's an anthology collected by Charles Van Doren (*Letters to Mother*) that brings together the correspondence of famous sons and daughters to their mothers—from Luther Burbank to Michael Faraday, from Susan B. Anthony to Amelia Earhart, from Francis Scott Key to Mendelssohn and Mozart. The opposite side of the coin is found in *Fathers to Sons*, a book of letters of paternal advice collected by Alan Valentine.

Other collections you might find useful are *A Treasury of the World's Great Letters* by M. Lincoln Schuster, which includes a letter from George Washington chronicling the cruel hardships endured by his troops at Valley Forge, the letter Charles Dickens wrote to his wife on the death of their infant daughter, and letters from the courtship of Pierre and Marie Curie, and *A Second Treasury of the World's Great Letters* collected by Wallace Brockway and Bart Keith Winer, which includes Dolley Madison's letter to her sister describing the British invasion of Washington, D.C., in 1814. *A Treasury of Great American Letters: Our Country's Life and History in the Letters of Its Men and Women* by Charles and Eleanor Hurd contains a letter from Christopher Columbus to the treasurer of King Ferdinand describing his arrival in the Caribbean, one from Abigail Adams to her daughter sharing her first impression of the new capital, and one from John F. Kennedy to young Peter Galbraith, who was upset that his father had been appointed ambassador to India and the family would have to move.

Of particular interest to young people is Edward Boykin's *To the Girls and Boys: Being the Delightful, Little-Known Letters of Thomas Jefferson to and from His Children and Grandchildren.* Here they can see photographs of the polygraph that Jefferson invented to make copies of his letters and the lap desk on which he wrote the Declaration of Independence, and they can learn that Jefferson kept every scrap of correspondence from his children and grandchildren. To his twelve-year-old daughter Martha he sent a schedule so that she might distribute her time without slighting music, dance, drawing, French, English, or *letter writing*. He concluded, "P.S. Keep my letters and read them at times that you may always have present in your mind those things which will endear you to me." Granddaughter Cornelia was nine when she wrote her first letter to her grandfather, then President of the United States. It began, "Dear Grandpapa, I hope you will excuse my bad writing, for it is the first letter I ever wrote, there are a number of faults, in it I know but those you will excuse." Jefferson answered promptly seven days later, "I congratulate you, my dear Cornelia, on having acquired the invaluable art of writing. How delightful to be enabled by it to converse with an absent friend, as if present." He added, "I rejoice that you have learnt to write for another reason; for, as that is done with a goose quill, you now know the value of a goose, and of course you will assist Ellen in taking care of the half dozen very fine grey geese which I shall send by Davy."

Youngsters will also be interested in examining the facsimile letters, with transcriptions in type, that Beatrix Potter wrote to the children of her former governess. Miss Potter illustrated these with delightful sketches of characters that sometimes appeared later in her books. In *Letters to Children* she writes of fishing and collecting bait, about puffins, and about her tame snail and its seventy-nine eggs now hatching.

Letters in Literature

Writers who have created some of our most powerful and beautiful literature have also left us part of themselves in their letters—authors like E. B. White, Emily Dickinson, Ernest Hemingway, and Carl Sandburg.

And sometimes letters are used to tell stories. There is *Dear Sarah* by Elisabeth Borchers, a beautifully illustrated book for youngsters that contains the letters and stories a father sends to his daughter as he travels on business to London, Paris, Amsterdam, Zurich, and Vienna. Another delightful book for young readers is *A Letter to Amy* by Ezra Jack Keats, also with full-page, full-color illustrations. *Dear Hildegarde* by Bernard Waber contains the letters animals write to wise old Hildegarde Owl and her replies. Among the creatures who turn to her for guidance are a moth, a giraffe, a pig, and a spider. Kerby Maxwell begins a marvelous adventure when his great-aunt sends him a box of stationery for his birthday. Kerby goes on a letter-writing binge—a belligerent note to the neighborhood bully, a letter to the cross old lady next door, even a letter to the governor. Kerby's amusing letter-writing escapade is told by Scott Corbett in *The Mailbox Trick*.

Older elementary students will enjoy F. N. Monjo's *Letters to Horseface: Being the Story of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Journey to Italy, 1769–1770, When He Was a Boy of Fourteen.* This book is beautifully designed and contains over forty drawings in the manner of the eighteenth-century sketchbook. The story is told through fictional but fact-filled letters from Mozart to his sister Nannerl (his nickname for her was Horseface!). This correspondence describes the sights of Italy as well as his meetings with dignitaries and musicians, his concerts, and his compositions (Mozart wrote his first full-length opera at fourteen). John Bellairs's suspense story *The Letter, the Witch, and the Ring* is set in motion by a mysterious deathbed letter, and *Mail-Order Wings* by Beatrice Gormley tells what happens when Andrea takes a chance on an ad on the back of a comic book and sends away for a pair of Wonda-Wings. In *A Letter Goes to Sea*, Lore Leher tells the story of a lonely Danish boy who puts a letter in a bottle and sets it adrift, hoping to find a friend who will answer it.

Stamp collecting is an important element in Vincent Cardinale's story of suspense, *Mystery of the Black Stamp*. Incidentally, a stamp auction is described in considerable detail.

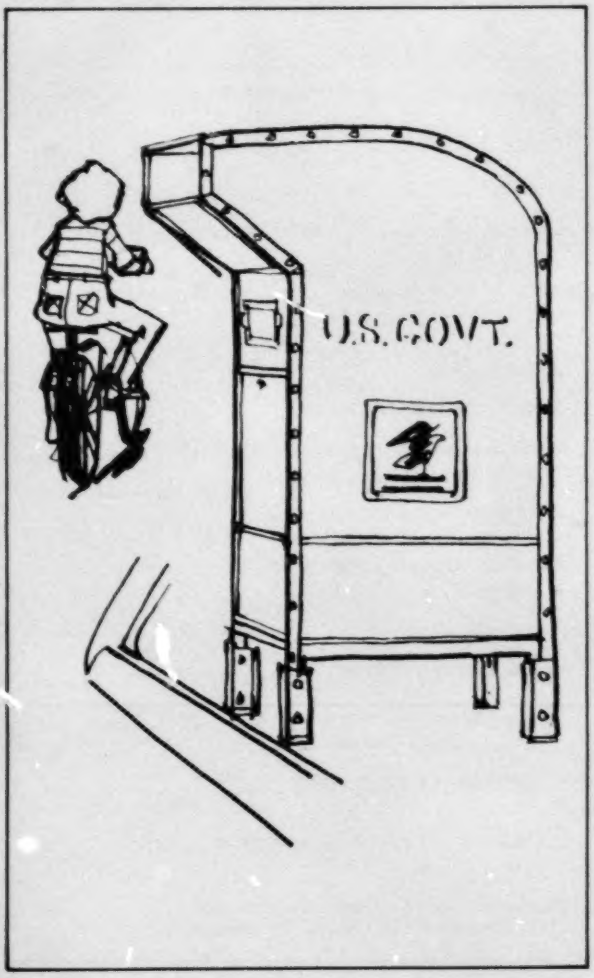
Books Inspired by Stamps

Mildred DePree in cooperation with the United States Committee for UNICEF uses postage stamps to introduce the geography, folklore, and poetry of many countries. Stamps, enlarged and in full color, provide the illustrations for her book, which includes kite-flying contests in China, Japanese doll festivals, Eskimo kayaks,

tribal masks, puppets, the circus, snowflakes, and Christmas stockings. Sports—ice hockey, soccer, baseball—and animals from around the world—pandas, kangaroos, zebras, puffins—are especially featured. The title: *A Child's World of Stamps: Stories, Poems, Fun and Facts from Many Lands.*

Emery Kelen takes an unusual approach to biography in *Stamps Tell the Story of John F. Kennedy.* Commemorative stamps from all over the world recreate the life of a president who captured the imagination of millions of people. There are stamps from South America, from West Germany, from Africa, from Cypress. Events covered, including their depiction in stamps, are Kennedy's youth, his years at Harvard, his wedding, his campaign, his children, and the funeral procession.

Mr. Kelen has written a second book, *Stamps Tell the Story of the United Nations,* that follows a similar plan. Here stamps from all over the world convey the words of the United Nations charter, its buildings, its special agencies, its overall concern for peace and human rights. Of special interest is the stamp depicting the Chagall window in the Secretariat Building in New York to commemorate the death of Dag Hammarskjöld. The souvenir sheet for this stamp was perforated in sections of varying dimensions so that the distinct components of the window would not be severed by perforation.



Dixie Ann Pace uses commemorative stamps to open each of the twenty-five biographies in her book, *Valiant Women.* Included among the women honored by their countries with commemorative stamps are Nefertiti, Cleopatra, Joan of Arc, Pocahontas, Marie Curie, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Grandma Moses.

Kids Write to Celebrities

Youngsters who enjoy the books of Marguerite Henry (*Brighty of the Grand Canyon, Misty of Chincoteague, Born to Trot, Stormy, White Stallion of Lipizza,* to name only some of her juvenile fiction) will enjoy *Dear Readers and Riders.* In this collection Miss Henry shares some of the many letters she has received from her young readers—and her answers. There are letters asking about her books and the characters in them—especially the horses—and questions about how she creates her stories. There are also many serious queries about horses answered in a factual manner: What's the difference between a foal and a colt, for example, or what do you do with a horse that is finicky about having its tail brushed?

Bill Adler has produced a pair of books that offer a kid's-eye view of recent politics: *Kids' Letters to President Carter* and *Kids' Letters to President Reagan.*

Moving the Mail

The Post Office Book: Mail and How It Moves by Gail Gibbons, *Read about the Postman* by Louis Slobodkin, *Where Does a Letter Go?* by Carla Greene, and *Sending the Word* by Walter Buehr inform youngsters about the history of sending messages as well as the operation of the postal system today. Slobodkin describes the clay postcards of ancient Persia and recounts an unusual method of sending a secret message. Over 3,000 years ago an Egyptian king wrote important messages on the shaved head of a slave who was then confined until his hair grew back. He was released to deliver the message, which was read by again shaving his head. Youngsters will also be interested to learn that butchers once served as important mail carriers in Holland and Germany. Because their occupation required butchers to travel from farm to farm and to attend cattle fairs, they were ideally suited to carry the mail. Walter Buehr's book informs young readers about Egyptian hieroglyphics, about the messages North American Indians wove with shells into wampum belts, about smoke signals and drum messages, about relays of runners carrying messages, and about homing pigeons.

The exciting if brief story of the Pony Express is told in many places; two of the more recent accounts are *Mail Riders* by Edith S. McCall and *The Story of the Pony Express* by R. Conrad Stein. Elementary schoolboys especially will enjoy reading the newspaper ad for riders that appeared in early 1860:

> WANTED—Young, skinny, wiry fellows not over 18. Must be expert riders willing to risk death daily. Orphans preferred.

The history of airmail makes exciting reading. Carroll V. Glines's *The Saga of the Air Mail* covers airborne mail from pigeons and balloons through the pioneering days of airplane flight right up to missile mail. There

are many interesting historical photos and a chapter on airmail stamps. A new Time-Life book by Donald Dale Jackson, *Flying the Mail*, is especially useful because of its many color photos and illustrations.

The contents of John Upton Terrell's book is clear from its title: *The United States Post Office Department: A Story of Letters, Postage, and Mail Fraud*. Older elementary students will be particularly intrigued by the world of postal inspectors.

Johanna Petersen has written *Careers with the Postal Service* with the young reader in mind. Some of the careers she describes include fleet manager, mail sorter, window clerk, customer service representative, data processing clerk, mail truck driver, loading dock worker, cancellation machine operator, and postmaster. The color photos show postal employees at work and help young people understand the nature of these jobs.

Other Interesting Books

Teachers interested in the social history of institutions will find two books by Wayne E. Fuller fascinating reading. *The American Mail: Enlarger of the Common Life* relates the three-hundred-year history of the postal system. Through that story we can trace the history of America, for nearly all aspects of the American past—military, religious, social, political, economic—are connected to the postal system. Where people went, the mail followed. *RFD: The Changing Face of Rural America* provides a history of the origin and development of one branch of the postal system and along with it a description of day-to-day life in rural and small town America in the 1900s. Fuller recounts the fight to establish rural free delivery and the struggle to create parcel post. There is the fabulous story of mail-order firms and the effect of free delivery on rural roads. And one can read, as documented in the *Congressional Record*, how RFD was purported to have reduced suicide in rural America by providing isolated citizens with someone to talk to.

Sending Messages by John Stewig relies on large, full-page illustrations and photographs to teach young readers about the many ways people communicate. Obviously messages are written and spoken, but this book shows us many interesting and surprising ways of letting others know what we have in mind: the signals used by police, referees, and airport personnel, mime and dance, Morse code and braille, the hand language of the deaf, hobo signs, cattle brands, the language of the Indian feather.

SWAK: The Complete Book of Mail Fun for Kids by Randy Harelson describes a number of activities to enhance letter writing—games, codes, and craft projects.

Jan Adkins's *Letterbox* shows how letters and the tools used to form them have evolved through the ages. Students interested in printing and calligraphy will enjoy this book, but any young letter writer will respond to the author's sense of the "comfort" of letters, their physical presence and nuance of meaning. Adkins reminds us that "a letter is an opportunity to speak slowly and well, to communicate in the best way you can. The feel of pen on paper, the small world of the page, the feeling of accomplishment, the little thrill of dropping an envelope into the letterbox, and the anticipation of returning mail are some of the pleasures of the letter writer."